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## SMALL TOWN, BIG CLEARCUT

Why aren't Oregon's schools protected from pesticides?

BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

The once forested hillside looks like some sort of post-apocalyptic wasteland: a cheerful green and white clapboard schoolhouse, surrounded by stumps of trees and piles of charred, dead slash.

It may not be a one-room schoolhouse, but the Triangle Lake School in rural Blachly is as close as it comes. There are a few more than 100 students, from kindergarten through high school seniors, all on one small campus.

The school was recently rated "exceptional" by the state for the second time in a row. But some parents in this tiny Coast Range town about half an hour west of Eugene want to know why their school is in the middle of a clearcut and why their exceptional kids could get exposed to pesticides that might make them sick. There are no laws in Oregon requiring buffer zones around schools for clearcuts or toxic sprays. And some people in this small town feel like it's a case of big business hurting their homes and children.

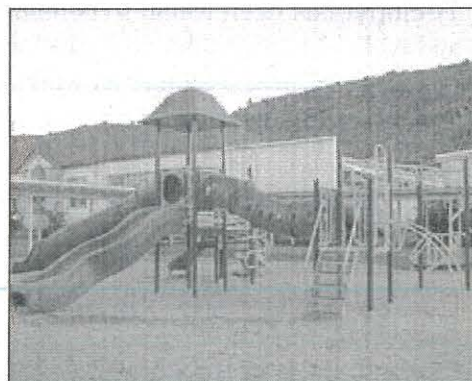
When parents drove up to drop off their kids on the first day of school last fall, the surrounding 50 acre forest was gone, clearcut by Weyerhaeuser. Another five acres that belongs to the school was razed as well, at the request of the School Board. Nothing was left around the school — no buffer, just mud and broken branches on the surrounding hillside. Weyerhaeuser did not respond to *EW's* requests for an interview before press time.

Day Owen and Neila Crocker, whose three children attend Triangle Lake School, realized the clearcut was only the beginning: Clearcutting is almost always followed by pesticide spraying. The couple has been campaigning for several years against the aerial spraying of pesticides after logging. Roseburg Forest Products recently used a helicopter to spray over a clearcut near Owen and Crocker's organic farm. As the helicopter swooped and sprayed chemicals for four hours, the family videoed the spraying and went about their farm chores. "Just because they're spraying, I can't not go out," said Crocker. "I have to milk the goats and water."

But after a couple hours of being exposed to the spray the couple says was drifting over them, they began to get sick. "Heart palpitations, heart pain," said Crocker. "Imagine being the sickest you've ever been," said Owen, "muscles shaking and spasming."



Clearcut above Triangle Lake School. Photo by Gary Hale.



The clearcut looms over Triangle Lake School's playground. Photo by Gary Hale.



They rushed to their local doctor. Owen said, and even hours later, "My life signs were off the chart."

If this could happen to them, they wondered: What would happen if Weyerhaeuser came to spray pesticides on the clearcut only feet away from Triangle Lake School's classroom doors? A small group of parents and concerned citizens set out to fix the problem.

## PESTICIDES AND KIDS

The word "pesticide" is a catch-all for a variety of "cides": herbicides, rodenticides, insecticides, fungicides and so on. Under U.S. law, substances used as plant growth regulators, defoliants or desiccants are all pesticides. The suffix "cide" comes from the Latin meaning slayer, murderer or cutter.

Weyerhaeuser no longer plans to aerially spray the area but still proposes to use a variety of pesticides near Triangle Lake School through other methods. According to the notification documents filed with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), the pesticides to be applied include imazapyr (brand names Arsenal AC and Chopper) and triclopyr (sold as Garlon 4).

Imazapyr can cause irreversible damage to the eyes and is irritating to the skin, according to a fact sheet published by the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP). Symptoms in laboratory animals chronically exposed to imazapyr include fluid accumulation in the lungs, kidney cysts and abnormal blood formation in the spleen. Studies show "an increase in the number of brain and thyroid cancers in male rats and an increase in the number of tumors and cancers of the adrenal gland in female rats." According to the fact sheet, imazapyr has contaminated surface and ground water following aerial and ground forestry applications and can persist in the soil for up to a year.

Triclopyr has been found to contaminate ground water, streams and wells. In laboratory tests triclopyr caused an increase in the incidence of breast cancer as well as an increase in a type of genetic damage called "dominant lethal mutations."

Regulating pesticides around schools would involve everything from these commonly used forestry herbicides to wasp sprays and ant poison. Aimee Code of NCAP said, "There's a lot of research talking about pesticides and children." She points to studies that show that children are more prone to be exposed to pesticides "through the way that they play; they are lower to the ground and engage in hand-to-mouth activities." They also have trouble



Photo by Gary Hale



Day Owen and Neila Crocker



Photo by Gary Hale



ridding their body of the chemicals: "A child's liver, the main route to purging chemicals," she said, "is not fully formed until 7 years old."

Code points to a Canadian study that poses the idea that "children have a longer life expectancy in which to develop diseases with long latency periods." In other words, if a 5-year-old child and a 50-year-old adult both receive a one-time exposure to a pesticide that takes 40 years to cause cancer, the child has a much higher lifetime risk of getting the disease because the adult might die of other causes before the pesticide-induced cancer developed.

More than 20 research articles collected by Oregon Toxics Alliance (OTA) show effects like neurologic motor skill and memory problems as well as increased incidences of leukemia and autism in children exposed to pesticides.

## PESTICIDES AND SCHOOLS

There are laws in Oregon creating logging and pesticide buffer zones around streams for salmon. But the state of Oregon has no law mandating buffer zones from pesticides near schools or bus stops.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, pesticides can contaminate areas near where they were applied through "erosion, migration, volatility or contaminated soil particles that are windblown at application." The chemicals can also move through "pesticide drift" — when droplets of chemicals are carried through the air to nearby areas, according to the EPA. The EPA says the agency gets "thousands of complaints of spray drift a year."

Oregon grape growers are aware of the dangers of pesticide drift to their crops. Studies by OSU researchers show that "drift from growth-regulator herbicides can injure grapes half mile or more from the application site."

Data collected by OTA show 68 instances in which someone reported problems with a pesticide on a school campus in Oregon since 1998. One case in April 2007 involved the possible exposure of children and pregnant women at a Multnomah County daycare. In another, a school bus driver in Junction City reported children getting on the bus coughing after a plane sprayed pesticides near their bus stop.

Last year Oregon Senate Bill 20 and House Bill 2978 proposed to prohibit aerial spraying of pesticides within one mile of school property during the school year and within one mile of a road that services a school property during morning and afternoon commute times. It would also have required that the sprayer draw up a written plan before spraying within five miles of school. The bill didn't make it out of committee during the 2007 legislative session, and it won't come up again until 2009. The Senate commissioned a workgroup made up of staunch pesticide opponents, industry groups like Oregonians for Food and Shelter (OFS), government representatives and ordinary concerned citizens to discuss the pesticide issue.

Some members of the group, such as Lisa Arkin of OTA, want to see pesticides kept away from areas where children could be exposed to them. Others, such as Terry Witt of OFS who lobbied against Senate Bill 20, don't want to see buffer zones "without regard to the impact on land owners," and stressed the need to "define if there is a problem." According to OFS' website, its primary goal is in "protecting those who responsibly use pest management products, soil nutrients and biotechnology from government over regulation."



Without legislative protection, schools like Triangle Lake that abut private lands where farmers and foresters choose to use pesticides are caught in the crossfire. Some school districts, such as Eugene's 4J, use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to control weeds and pests and protect schoolchildren, but the rest of Lane County's kids and most kids in Oregon are not protected from pesticides at their schools.

According to the EPA, IPM involves using strategies like managing indoor and outdoor spaces to keep pests from becoming a threat and using "less *risky* pest control options" first, with broadcast spraying as last resort. According to Arkin, Oregon's 17-year-old definition of IPM is out of date, doesn't mention schools other than universities and needs to be revised to be in accordance with the EPA's definition.

## NO SPRAY FOR TRIANGLE LAKE?

A small group of determined Blachly residents decided to fight Weyerhaeuser's plan to spray the clearcut with pesticides.

The School Board had decided about six years ago to log the school's trees whenever Weyerhaeuser cut theirs. They were told the school's trees might blow down onto the building without the protection of the Weyerhaeuser trees, said Triangle Lake School's Superintendent/Principal Steve Dickenson. The possibility of falling trees was "a bigger problem than the lack of beauty that we have here now," he said. He also cited the fire danger of the trees so near the building.

It has largely gone unmentioned that studies show clearcuts often leave hillsides prone to mudslides. The hill behind the school ranges from a 35 to 65 percent slope. Slopes greater than 65 percent are considered "high" landslide risk, according to the ODF. Oregon's Coast Range has been cited as an area particularly prone to landslides.

Weyerhaeuser has offered to provide trees for replanting the school's clearcut acres, and to create a buffer of native trees to re-create a nature trail that was used by Triangle Lake's athletes for conditioning. The trail meandered from the school to the Blachly Lakeview Cemetery, which also borders the clearcut (see sidebar).

Dickenson said Weyerhaeuser offered to spray pesticides on their own clearcut through ground application rather than aerially spray the chemicals near the school. Parents asked the School Board to write a letter to the company requesting it not spray any pesticides at all. The board declined to write the letter. "It's not to the public to tell private owners how to manage their property," Dickenson said. The School Board is currently considering a request for parental notification before pesticides are used on school property.

Dickenson, whose first day on the job coincided with the logging, said while Weyerhaeuser intends to chemically treat its land, he is working with the concerned parents and community members like Owen and Crocker who want to avoid using chemicals on the school's own acres.

The parents and nearby residents have offered to control the weeds like Scotch broom and blackberries that often invade clearcuts in Oregon through what is called "manual release." Rather than killing invasive shrubs with imazapyr and triclopyr, the shrubs would be uprooted or cut down by hand. The residents have also offered to do the replanting of the school's acres with native trees and shrubs that don't pose a danger to the school. They are considering rhododendrons and huckleberries.

Paul Clements, whose office at the ODF has jurisdiction over forestry in the Blachly area, said



"reforestation is required within 12 months" after clearcuts, with trees suited to the site. Reforestation is done in part to prevent landslides. Most timber companies replant mainly with Douglas fir, creating a tree plantation to cut again in the future. "There is no rule that you have to apply pesticides," Clements said.

One study done by the Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station showed that Douglas fir tree grew back in a greater volume after manual release compared to herbicide spraying.

Superintendent/Principal Dickenson described the concerned residents and parents who have come to every school board meeting since the clearcutting as "polite and persistent" and said they have "provided tons of data that support their position" to School Board members. "They're passionate, and we appreciated that," he said.

Freelance writer and school neighbor Rob Lafferty is chair of the replanting committee. While he appreciated the efforts Weyerhaeuser has made, he said, "I don't like their practices." Weyerhaeuser burned all the slash piles on the property at once during Christmas break, and Lafferty said that "the air quality was bad for a day and half." Community reaction to the clearcut has been mixed though "universally against the aerial spray," he said. The Triangle Lake area has been a timber community for decades. But Lafferty said that recently "The logging is all BLM and timber companies," not local businesses.

The parents and residents have until May to submit a plan to the school board and get enough volunteers to remove the weeds and replant. "My attitude is give them a chance," said Dickenson. If the parents do succeed, the school could still resort to chemicals.

But parents like Owen and Crocker still worry about the effects of the pesticides the timber companies use on the lands surrounding the school and their farm. "Manual spray can still lead to chemical run-off," said NCAP's Aimee Code.

Between 1995 and 2006, timber companies have aerially sprayed pesticides 15 times within a two-mile radius of the school, according to mapping by Jan Wroncy of Forestland Dwellers. OTA and other anti-pesticide advocates hope that Oregon will legislate against aerial spraying of pesticides near schools so other small towns won't face the threat that looms over Triangle Lake School.

"Go look at our school. Go look at our cemetery. That's what they're doing for our rural community," said Owen.

*To find out more about the effort to replant near Triangle Lake School without using pesticides contact Rob Lafferty at [rob@lakecreekvalley.info](mailto:rob@lakecreekvalley.info) or call 925-3999. Jan Wroncy and Forestland Dwellers ([www.forestlanddwellers.org](http://www.forestlanddwellers.org)) compile a list of scheduled pesticide sprays in Lane County, published each week in EW. The list includes sprays adjacent to schools. Go to NCAP at [www.pesticide.org](http://www.pesticide.org) and OTA at [www.oregontoxics.org](http://www.oregontoxics.org) to find out more about pesticides and kids.*

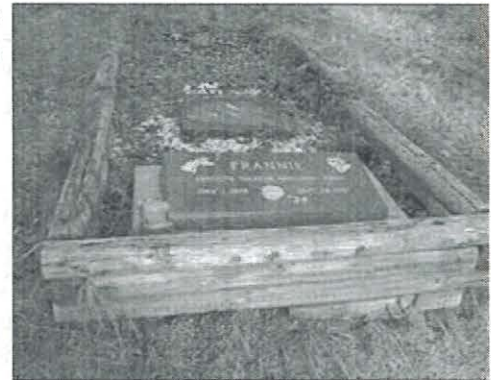
## Cemetery Clearcut

On the other side of the Triangle Lake clearcut, just a short hike from the school, lies the Blachly

Lakeview Cemetery. Francine "Frannie" Hamilton-Moon lies buried there. "She was born and raised in area," said her mother, Candy Moon. Frannie went to Triangle Lake School, and her gravestone bears the images of a basketball with her jersey's number and a horse. Ten years after Frannie died at 18, her mother said, "I was just coming home from town, and I drove up there like I do sometimes. I was just flabbergasted." The cemetery, like the school where Frannie once went to class, was in the middle of a clearcut.

Not everyone sees the clearcut as a problem. The clearcut "doesn't bother me," Maxine Renken said. "I was raised with logging. This wasn't the first time it's been logged, and it won't be the last."

Renken's family goes back for five or six generations in Blachly. Her parents and grandparents are buried in the cemetery. She visits the graveyard regularly and is the secretary and treasurer of the cemetery association. She chokes up when she says her elderly mother, who has come to visit the graves with her, mentioned wanting to be cremated rather than buried.



Renken's son is a millwright, and her husband was a feller and buckner. "When I went to school here, everyone that lived here worked at the mill," she said.

"Give it two or three years, and it will be green again," she said, and pointed to a green space that Weyerhaeuser had cleared, leaving room for more graves. "I think it looks better than it did. I know there are people that would disagree."

Moon wants to see a law, a county ordinance or something from the state that gives places like cemeteries a buffer zone. "They're all saying it's going to grow back, but not in my lifetime," she said. Moon wants Weyerhaeuser to plant some rhododendrons, "a few really nice bushes."

"The best I got out of them was that they would put a stone bench up there," she said.

"If it was a small outfit, family owned, that really needed the timber, I could see it. Weyerhaeuser has billions of acres. What's 10 acres to them? They didn't have to do this."

Of her daughter's grave, she said, "I don't want her in the middle of a clearcut."



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